# A Four-Domain Model for Detecting Deception An Alternative Paradigm for Interviewing

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or 30 years, the literature on interviewing has emphasized the use of both verbal and nonverbal cues in detecting deception during the interview process.<sup>1</sup> Much of that emphasis paralleled the immense amount of research during that same time period in the area of psychology and the study of nonverbal behavior. Unfortunately, many people still misinterpret a significant amount of nonverbal behavior as indicative of deception when, in fact, it just may be nervousness or such behavior as face touching that also can indicate honesty.2

Repeated studies have shown that traditional methods of detecting deception during interviews succeed only 50 percent of the time, even for experienced law enforcement officers.3 In spite of this, investigators still need the ability to test the veracity of those they interview. To do so, investigators require a model that incorporates research with empirical experience to differentiate honesty from deception. They can use an alternative paradigm for detecting deception based on four critical domains: comfort/ discomfort, emphasis, synchrony, and perception management.

### Comfort/Discomfort

Comfort is readily apparent in conversations with family members and friends. People sense when



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others have a good time and when they feel comfortable in their presence. Experiencing comfort in the presence of strangers becomes more difficult, especially in stressful situations, such as during an interview. A person's level of comfort or discomfort is one of the most important clues interviewers should focus on when trying to establish veracity. Tension and distress most often manifest upon guilty people who must carry the knowledge of their crimes with them. Attempting to disguise their guilt places a distressing cognitive load on them as they struggle to fabricate answers to what otherwise would be simple auestions.4

When comfortable, an individual's nonverbal behavior tends to mirror the other person present.<sup>5</sup> For example, if one person leans forward, the other tends to do so as well. Or, if one leans to the side with hands in pockets and feet crossed, the other person may do the same. Subconsciously, people demonstrate their comfort with whom they are talking. When

touched, people may touch back to emphasize a point. Some may display their comfort more openly, such as showing more of their torso and the insides of their arms and legs. People who speak the truth more often display comfort because they have no stress to conceal nor do they have guilty knowledge to make them feel uncomfortable.<sup>6</sup>

While seated at a table, people comfortable with each other will move objects aside so that nothing blocks their view. Over time, they may draw closer so that they do not have to talk as loud, and their breathing rhythm, tone of speech, pitch, and general demeanor will become similar.

Subtleties of comfort contrast with discomfort. People show discomfort when they do not like what is happening to them, what they are seeing or hearing, or when others compel them to talk about things that they would prefer to keep hidden. People first display discomfort physiologically—heart rates quicken, hairs stand up, perspiration increases, and breathing

becomes faster. Beyond the physiological responses, which are autonomic and require very little thinking, people primarily manifest discomfort nonverbally instead of vocally. They tend to move their bodies by rearranging themselves, jiggling their feet, fidgeting, or drumming their fingers when scared, nervous, or significantly uncomfortable.<sup>7</sup>

If, while the interviewer remains relaxed and poised, the interviewee continually looks at the clock, sits tensely, or does not move ("flash frozen"), the interviewer may discern a lack of comfort even though everything may appear normal to the untrained eye. Interviewees show discomfort when they repeatedly talk about finalizing the interview or when disruptions appeal to them.

People tend to distance themselves from those with whom they feel uncomfortable. Even while sitting side by side, people will lean away from those with whom they feel uncomfortable, often moving either their torsos or their feet away or toward an exit, which nonverbally exhibits displeasure.9 These actions can occur in interviews due to the subject matter discussed. Likewise, people create artificial barriers with either their shoulders and arms or with inanimate objects in front of them. For example, by the end of one interview, a very uncomfortable and dishonest interviewee had built a little barrier in front of himself using soda cans, pencil holders, and various documents, ultimately planting a backpack on the table between himself and the interviewer. At the time, the interviewer did not

recognize the subject's obvious intent of creating a barrier.

Other clear signs of discomfort include rubbing the forehead near the temple region, squeezing the face, rubbing the neck, or stroking the back of the head with the hand. <sup>10</sup> Interviewees often will show their displeasure by rolling their eyes out of disrespect; picking lint off themselves (preening); talking down to the interviewer; giving short answers; becoming resistant, hostile, or sarcastic; or displaying "micro gestures" with indecent connotations, such as "giving the finger." <sup>11</sup>

Eyes also serve as formidable communicators of discomfort, yet investigators often ignore them during interviews. People use their eyes as a blocking mechanism similar to folding their arms across their chest or turning away from those with whom they disagree. In a similar response, when people do not like something they hear, they usually close their eyes as if to block out what they just heard. They do this subconsciously and so often that others do not pay attention to it in day-to-day affairs. People may close their eyes before touching or rubbing them as if to further block or relieve themselves of what they just heard. Interviewers can capitalize on this behavior by noting when interviewees block with their eyes. This may point to questions that trouble the subject or to issues with which they are struggling. In most cases, eye blocking proves extremely accurate in highlighting issues problematic to the interviewee. Additionally, when people feel troubled or frustrated or they have a subdued temper tantrum, their eyelids may close or flutter rapidly as an expression of their sentiment.12 Research also has shown that when people are nervous or troubled, their blink rate increases, a phenomenon often seen with liars under stress.13 In one case where investigators closely videotaped the interviewee, observers in another room catalogued the subject's blink rate increase from 27 times per minute to 84 times a minute during stressful questions. Investigators should consider all of the eye manifestations that fall under the comfort/discomfort domain as powerful clues to how subjects register information or what questions prove problematic.



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When interpreting eye contact, however, many misconceptions still exist. Little or no eye contact is perceived erroneously by some as a classic sign of deception, especially during questioning, while the truthful should "lock eyes." This may be accurate for some but not for all. For instance, research shows that Machiavellian<sup>14</sup> people actually will increase eye contact during deception. This may occur because they know that many interviewers look for this feature. Also, some

people learned to look down or away from parental authority as a form of respect when questioned or scolded. Investigators should remain aware of changes in eye contact and eye behavior during interviews. They should establish the interviewee's default pattern of eye behavior during benign questioning then look for changes or indicators of discomfort as the interview progresses, which often gives clues to deception.

# **Emphasis**

When people speak, they naturally incorporate various parts of their body, such as the eyebrows, head, hands, arms, torso, legs, and feet, to emphasize a point for which they feel deeply or emotionally. This movement proves important to investigators because, as a rule, people emphasize when genuine. Liars, for the most part, do not emphasize with nonverbals.16 They will think of what to say and how to deceive, but rarely do they think about the presentation of the lie. When compelled to lie, most people do not realize how much emphasis or accentuation enters into everyday conversations. For the interviewer, emphasis accurately reflects reality or the truth.<sup>17</sup> When liars attempt to fabricate an answer, their emphasis looks unnatural or is delayed; they rarely emphasize where appropriate, or they choose to do so only on unimportant matters.

People accentuate both verbally and nonverbally in their interactions. They emphasize verbally through voice, pitch, tone, or repetition. On the other hand, they emphasize nonverbally, which can prove even more accurate and useful to investigators. People who typically use their hands while speaking punctuate their remarks with hand gestures that emphatically illustrate or exclaim. They also may thrust forward, point, or pound the desk as they emphasize. Others accentuate with the tips of their fingers, either touching things or gesturing with them. Hand behaviors compliment speech, thoughts, and true sentiments.<sup>18</sup> Raising eyebrows (eyebrow flash) or widening eyes also emphasizes a point.19

When interested, people lean their torsos forward and, often, employ gravity-defying gestures, such as raising up on the balls of their feet as they make a significant or emotionally charged point. While sitting down, some emphasize by raising the knee to highlight important points. Occasionally, people will add emphasis by slapping their knee as it comes up, indicative of emotional exuberance. Gravity-defying gestures symbolize emphasis and true sentiment, both of which liars rarely possess.

In contrast, people de-emphasize or show lack of commitment by speaking behind their hands or showing limited facial expression as if to control their countenance because they are not committed to what they are saying.<sup>20</sup> Deceptive people often show deliberative, pensive displays, such as touching fingers to their chin or stroking their cheeks, as though they still are thinking about something, rather than emphasizing the point they are making. They are evaluating what

they said and how it is being received, which is inconsistent with honest behavior.

### **Synchrony**

In interviewing and detecting deception, synchrony plays an important role. Ideally, synchrony (e.g., harmony, congruence, and concordance) should occur between the interviewer and the interviewee; between what is said vocally and nonverbally; between the circumstances of the moment and what the subject is saying; and between events and emotions, including synchrony of time and space.



In an interview setting, the tone of both parties should mirror each other over time if synchrony exists. <sup>21</sup> A certain amount of harmony occurs in speech patterns, sitting styles, touching frequency, and general expressions. An interviewer and subject "out of sync" become subtly palpable because each will sit differently, talk in a manner or tone dissimilar from the other, and possibly have expressions at

odds, if not totally disparate, with each other. These circumstances prohibit effective communication, an element pertinent to successful interviewing.

When interviewed, people who answer in the affirmative should have congruent head movement supporting what they say. Lack of synchrony often occurs when people say, "I did not do it," while nodding their heads up and down as if to say, "yes, I did." Or, when asked, "Would you lie about this?" their heads again bob up and down. Upon catching themselves in this faux pas, they then reverse their head movement. When observed, these instances are almost comical and amateurish. More often, a mendacious statement, such as "I did not do it," precedes a noticeably delayed and less emphatic negative head movement. These behaviors are not synchronous and, therefore, more likely to be equated with a lie.

Synchrony should occur between what is being said and the events of the moment. During a street interview, if the subject interjects with superfluous information or facts totally irrelevant, the officer should note the disharmony. The information and facts should remain pertinent to the issue at hand, the circumstances, and the questions. When the answers are asvnchronous with the event and questions, officers may assume that something likely is wrong or the person is stalling for time to fabricate a story.

For instance, when parents report the alleged kidnapping of their infant, synchrony should occur between the event (kidnapping) and

their emotions. The complainant should be clamoring for law enforcement assistance, emphasizing every detail, feeling the depth of despair, showing an eagerness to help, and willing to retell the story, even at personal risk. When placid individuals make such reports, they appear more concerned with furnishing one particular version of the story, lacking consistent emotional displays or seem more concerned about their well-being and how they are perceived vis-a-vis the egregious event (alleged kidnapping of a loved one). These examples do not exhibit synchrony with circumstances and prove inconsistent with honesty.

Last, synchrony should exist between events, time, and space. A person who delays reporting a significant event, such as the drowning of a fellow passenger, or one who travels to another jurisdiction to report the event rightfully should come under suspicion. Additionally, interviewers should remain cognizant of subjects who report events that would have been impossible for them to observe from the vantage point from which they tell the story. People who lie do not think of how synchrony fits into the equation; yet, it plays a major role during interviews and the reporting of crimes.

### **Perception Management**

Perception management occurs both verbally and nonverbally. During interviews, liars often use perception management, a concept with which psychopaths are well acquainted, to influence their intended targets of deception.<sup>22</sup> For instance, nonverbally, subjects will yawn excessively as if to show that they feel bored. If the person is sitting, they may slouch or splay out on a couch, stretch their arms, and cover more territory as if to demonstrate their comfort.

Verbally, liars will try to vocalize their honesty, integrity, and the implausibility of their involvement in committing a crime. They will try to "look good" to the interviewer.

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They may use perception management statements, such as "I could never hurt someone," "Lying is below me," "I have never lied," "I would never do such a thing," all of which should alert investigators to the possibility of deception. Other statements, such as "to be perfectly frank," "to be honest," "to be perfectly truthful," or "I was always taught to tell the truth," are solely intended to influence the perception of the interviewer.<sup>23</sup>

Other forms of perception management include attending the interview with someone of prominence in the community or a retinue of so-called close friends. Further, subjects may self-medicate through the use of alcohol or prescription drugs to appear placid and content. They may change their clothing or hair styles to appear more genuine or more socially conventional.

In all of these examples, subjects attempt to manage the perception of the interviewer. People practice perception management every day, such as getting dressed for a date. However, when it manifests itself in an interview setting, investigators should recognize such efforts and question the intent.

## Conclusion

The detection of deception remains a difficult task. Interviewers can enhance their ability to detect deception by focusing on four domains—comfort/discomfort, emphasis, synchrony, and perception management—rather than merely trying to detect traditional signs of deception, which, in some cases, may be misleading.<sup>24</sup> The research in this area over the last 20 years is unequivocal. Nonverbal behaviors, in and of themselves, do not clearly indicate deception.25 However, when interviewers notice a display of discomfort and a lack of comfort, emphasis, synchrony, and perception management, a greater certitude for assessing deception exists.

Investigators can expect subjects to react poorly in one or two areas. But, to do so in all four domains indicates communication problems, which may originate from the interviewee's antipathy toward the interviewer or law enforcement or result from culpability, guilty knowledge, or

dishonesty. Regardless, in these cases, information likely did not flow freely from the interviewee, which rendered an interview of limited value or, worse, a complete fabrication.

### **Endnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> Fred E. Inbau and et. al., *Criminal Interrogation and Confessions*, 4th ed. (Gaithersburg, MD: Aspen Publishers, Inc., 2001), ix.
- <sup>2</sup> Charles V. Ford, *Lies! Lies! Lies!: The Psychology of Deceit* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press, Inc., 1996), 200.
  <sup>3</sup> Ibid., 217.
- <sup>4</sup> B.M. DePaulo, J.I. Stone, and G.D. Lassiter, *Deceiving and Detecting Deceit*, in *The Self and Social Life*, edited by B.R. Schlender, (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1985), 323-370.
- <sup>5</sup> Mark L. Knapp and Judith A. Hall, Nonverbal Communication in Human

*Interaction*, 3d ed. (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, College Publishers, 1997), 277.

- <sup>6</sup> Paul Ekman, *Telling Lies: Clues to Deceit in the Marketplace, Politics, and Marriage* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 1985), 185.
- <sup>7</sup> Gavin De Becker, *The Gift of Fear* (New York, NY: Dell Publishing, 1997), 133.
  - <sup>8</sup> Supra note 5, 321.
  - <sup>9</sup> Supra note 5, 320.
- <sup>10</sup> David G. Givens, *The Nonverbal Dictionary of Gestures, Signs & Body Language Cues* (Spokane, WA: Center for Nonverbal Studies, 1998-2002); http://members.aol.com/nonverbal2/diction1.htm
  - <sup>11</sup> Supra note 6, 101-103.
- <sup>12</sup> Joe Navarro and John R. Schafer, "Detecting Deception," *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, July 2001, 10.
  - 13 Supra note 5, 467.
- <sup>14</sup> "Suggesting the principles of conduct laid down by Machiavelli; specifically marked by cunning, duplicity, or bad faith," *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed., s.v. "Machiavellian."

- <sup>15</sup> R.E. Exline, J. Thibaut, C.B. Hickey, and P. Gumpert, *Visual Interaction in Relation to Machiavellianism and an Unethical Act*, in R. Christie and F.L. Geis (eds.), *Studies in Machiavellianism* (New York, NY: Academic Press, 1970).
- <sup>16</sup> David J. Lieberman, *Never Be Lied to Again* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 37.
  - <sup>17</sup> Supra note 6, 107.
  - <sup>18</sup> Supra note 5, 277-284.
- <sup>19</sup> Desmond Morris, *Body Watching* (New York, NY: Crown Publishers, 1985), 61 and supra note 5, 68.
  - <sup>20</sup> Supra notes 5, 320, and 15, 37.
- <sup>21</sup> Robert B. Cialdini, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion* (New York, NY: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1993), 167-207.
- <sup>22</sup> J. Reid Meloy, *The Psychopathic Mind: Origins, Dynamics, and Treatment* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1998), 139.
  - <sup>23</sup> Supra note 16, 46.
  - <sup>24</sup> Supra note 6, 162-189.
  - <sup>25</sup> Supra notes 2, 217, and 6, 98.

